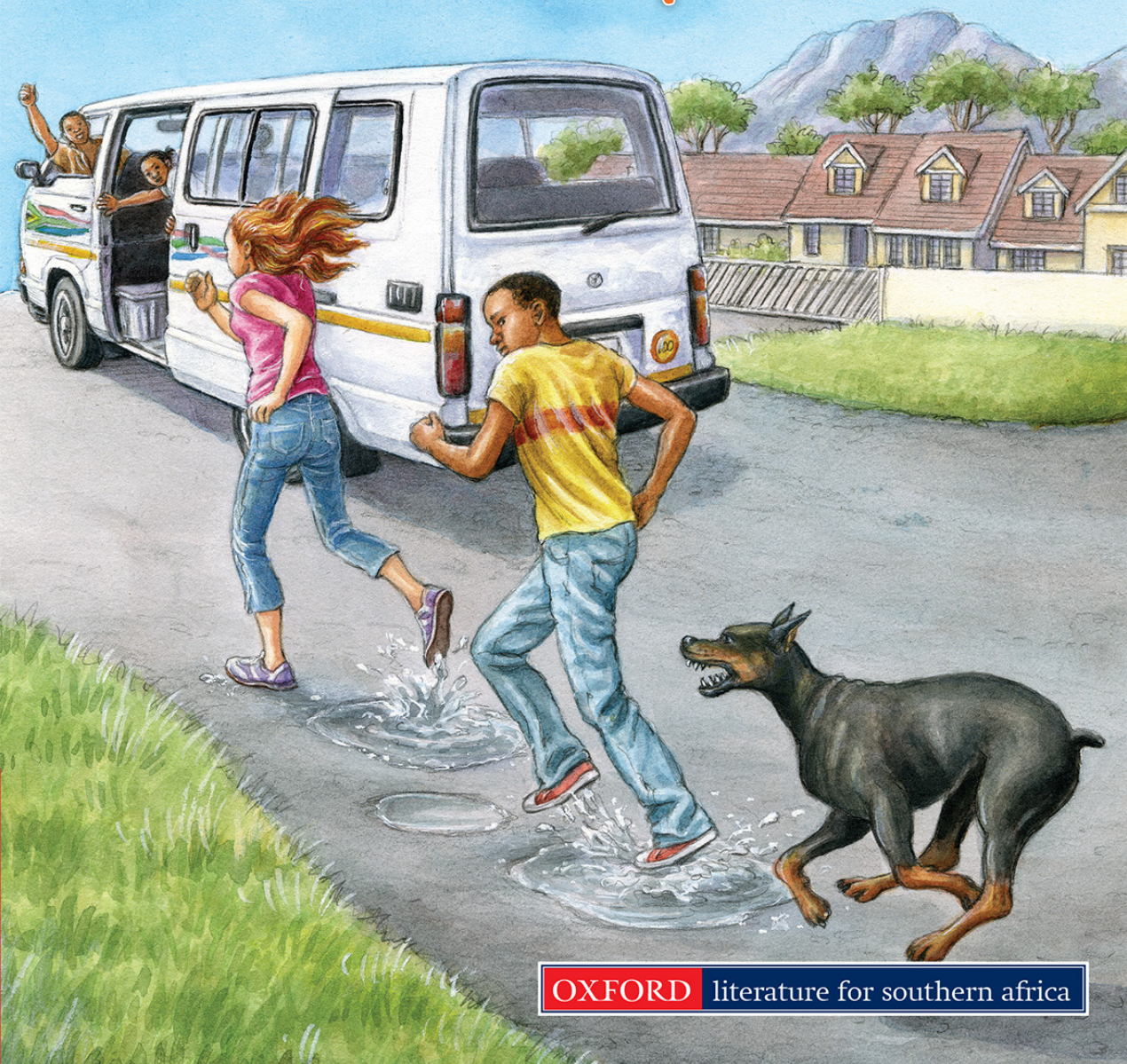




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The WHISTLERS



OXFORD literature for southern africa

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with additional material by Sean Greyling

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with him. “Mr Mouth” is what some of the other girls in their class called him behind his back.

“He’s not so bad.” Thulisa tried to defend him but she said it too quietly for anyone to notice.

Except Yonela.

“What, Miss Mousie?” she shouted and all the other girls screamed with laughter and teased her about “Mr Mouth” and “Miss Mousie”.

“Hey, Miss Mousie, how’s your boyfriend Mr Mouth?” they asked.

“He’s not my boyfriend,” she muttered. The truth was that Menzi was more like a brother than a boyfriend.

Thulisa wished she had as much confidence as Yonela. She wished that when she answered a question in class her teachers did not have to ask her to repeat her answer because they had not heard it the first time. She wished she had the courage to speak when her parents complained to her about each other.

She always planned what she would say, but when the time came to say it, something happened – almost like a big hand closing around her throat – and nothing came out.

“Mum and Dad, I wish you would speak to each other instead of to me. I don’t want to hear the bad things you say about each other. It hurts me.” That is what she would say, loudly and firmly – if only she was brave enough. Instead she said nothing and tried not to listen to their arguments.

She opened her Maths book and began to concentrate on a difficult equation, knowing that it would make her forget her troubles for a while.

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“Helloooo!” the call came with a knock on the back door of her house.

“Coming.” Thulisa jumped up from her desk.

Buhle was standing in the back yard, still dressed in her smart work suit. She and her baby had moved into the small zinc shack in Thulisa’s back yard three months ago. Thulisa’s parents had decided to rent it out to make some extra money. They thought that Buhle would be a good

Style

“almost like a big hand closing around her throat”. What figure of speech is this and what does it mean?

Setting

How are we introduced to the main characters in this chapter? What do we learn about them? What is the setting in which the story starts?

tenant¹ because she had a permanent job as a receptionist in the city and would pay her rent on time every month. It was a miracle, Thulisa thought, that they had agreed about something for a change.

“Please Thulisa,” said Buhle now with her kind smile, “will you watch Anita for me while I go and buy veggies for supper? She’s sleeping now but she’ll wake up soon. I’ll feed her when I get back.”

“Sure,” said Thulisa. She was happy to help because she loved them both.

“Thanks, Sweetie. I’ll bring you something nice,” said Buhle, and she waved before disappearing down the narrow passage that ran along the side of Thulisa’s house to the front gate.

Chapter 2

Thulisa crossed the back yard to Buhle’s shack. She pushed the door open and walked over to the bed. Baby Anita was lying under a thin blanket in the middle of it.

The baby’s eyes were squeezed shut and her mouth made little sucking movements as she slept. She must be dreaming about her bottle. Thulisa blew gently on Anita’s face. She knew she should not wake her, but she wanted to play with her before Buhle returned.

Anita opened her eyes and her little pink mouth stretched open in a yawn.

“Hello Baba,” said Thulisa.

Anita looked up with shiny brown eyes and smiled a gummy smile. She was only six months old and didn’t have any teeth yet.

Thulisa’s heart melted with love and she imagined having her own baby one day. But she would qualify as a doctor first. Babies were wonderful, but a big responsibility.

Style

“heart melted with love”. What figure of speech is this and what does it mean?

1 **tenant:** person who lives in a flat or house and pays rent to the owner